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THE

POETICAL COMPOSITIONS

OF

ELIZABETH BENTLEY;

WHO,

UNIMPROVED BY EDUCATION,

Has given Proof of a ſtrong Natural Genius;

AND

Uſes her beſt Endeavours to obtain a Livelihood by honeſt Induſtry,
Living irreproachably with her AGED MOTHER,
NEAR ST. STEPHEN'S GATES,
NORWICH.

THE ENCOURAGERS

OF

INDIGENT MERIT

ARE ENTREATED TO FAVOR

THE AUTHORESS

WITH THEIR

NAMES AND SUBSCRIPTIONS;

Which will be taken in by W. STEVENSON, at the Norfolk Arms; and all the Bookſellers in Norwich.

NORWICH:
PRINTED BY CROUSE AND STEVENSON.

ODE TO CONTENT.

DAUGHTER of Innocence, deſcend,
Thou ſtranger to repining Care;
Whoſe breaſt no furious paſſions rend,
Let human hearts thy influence ſhare.
Why wilt thou ſtill our eager ſearch elude,
And thy fair form ſeclude?

Tho' Plenty decks the ſumptuous board,
And gaudy Splendour rules the feaſt;
Can theſe felicity afford,
If thou, Content, be not a gueſt?
Not all the wealth that rears an Indian throne,
Thy abſence can atone.

See idle Folly's frantic train,
Loud Riot rules their midnight hour;
Their boſoms rack'd with guilty pain,
Ne'er own'd thy ſoothing, balmy pow'r.
Remorſe with deadly venom points her dart,
They feel the rankling ſmart.

The ſimple hind, whoſe lowly cot,
Thy ever-placid ſmiles adorn;
Bleſt in his undiſtinguiſh'd lot,
With joy ſalutes each riſing morn;
And when he quits his daily toils for reſt,
No evil haunts his breaſt.

Be thou, O nymph, my conſtant guide,
Thro' varying Life's tempeſtuous ſeas;
'Tis thou canſt ſtem each adverſe tide,
And find th' unruffled port of Eaſe;
Thou canſt in ev'ry ſtorm a calm create,
And ſmile at angry Fate.

O grant me oft the temp'rate bliſs,
With thee to paſs the ſilent hour,
(To changeful Fortune's frown ſubmiſs)
In calm Retirement's ſhady bow'r;
Or with thy peaceful family to dwell,
In ſome ſequeſter'd cell.

Where Health is found with ruddy brow,
And Meekneſs flies the voice of Fame;
And Contemplation feels the glow
Of pure Devotion's hallow'd flame:
And radiant Hope, who darts her eagle eye
To ſcenes beyond the ſky.

Sincerity, with artleſs mien,
Firm Faith, whom Doubt can ne'er annoy;
Thy beauteous race ſhall join the ſcene,
Sedate Repoſe and tranquil Joy;
With Induſtry, who ſlaviſh Want diſdains,
And ſpurns Sloth's lagging chains.

Deign, gentle pow'r, on earth t' abide,
And ſhed thy breathing ſweets around;
Now o'er the ſocial hours preſide,
Now tread the ſolitary ground;
Celeſtial Happineſs, thy conſtant friend,
Shall all thy paths attend.

The following artleſs NARRATIVE, communicated by ELIZABETH BENTLEY to the Rev. Mr. WALKER, in NORWICH, muſt excite the Surprize, and, it is hoped, will ſecure to her the Patronage of thoſe who have peruſed the foregoing genuine Specimens of her Poetry.

REVEREND SIR,

IN compliance with your requeſt, I write the few particulars of my life, which are as follow:——I was born at Norwich, in the pariſh of All Saints, in November, 1767, and was the only child of my parents. My father's name was Daniel Bentley, by trade a journeyman cordwainer; who having received a good education himſelf, took upon him to teach me reading and ſpelling, but never gave me the leaſt idea of grammar. Being naturally fond of reading, I uſed to employ my leiſure hours with ſuch books as were in the houſe; which were chiefly a ſpelling-book, fable-book, dictionary, and books of arithmetic; and with ſuch little pamphlets as I could borrow of my neighbours. When I was about ten years of age, my father was afflicted with a paralytic ſtroke, which took from him the uſe of one ſide, and diſabled him from working at his buſineſs; but ſtill retaining the uſe of his right hand, and his diſorder not affecting his mental faculties, he taught me the art of writing, from copies in the ſpelling-book. My father was now obliged to go about ſelling garden-ſtuff for a living, till, a few months before his death, he obtained the place of book-keeper to the London coach, which then ſet out from the King's Head, in the Market-Place. His lameneſs continued till his deceaſe, which happened, by a ſecond ſtroke of the ſame diſorder, on the 25th of January, 1783, in the 48th year of his age; I being then about fifteen years old. My father died in the pariſh of St. Stephen, in which place my mother and I have continued ever ſince. About two years after my father's death, I diſcovered in myſelf an inclination for writing verſes, which I had no thought nor deſire of being ſeen; but my mother ſhewing my firſt productions to ſome acquaintances, they encouraged me to proceed. Soon after I purchaſed a ſmall grammar-book, ſecond hand, from which I attained the art of expreſſing myſelf correctly in my native language. My mother's maiden name was Lawrence, her father, when living, kept a cooper's ſhop in St. Stephen's pariſh.

This, Sir, is the ſhort hiſtory of my life; from which you will be pleaſed to ſelect ſuch paſſages as you may judge proper for the information of the public.

I remain, with gratitude and reſpect,

Your obliged ſervant,

July 23, 1790. ELIZABETH BENTLEY.

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